THE

EVIDENCE;

OR,

Religious and Moral Gazette.

RELIGION AND MORALITY ARE THE BASIS OF HUMAN FELICITY.

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No. I.

ON THE DIVINE EXISTENCE.

IF there is an infinite being, from whom all things have derived their existence, it must be very desirable to know how this truth appears. For if we believe an important truth, and are yet at a loss respecting the method by which such truth is made evident, the advantage and satisfaction resulting from our belief are considerably abridged. But provided we have a clear idea of an easy method of vindicating the grounds of our faith, and see the argument step by step which establishes beyond a question the truth of what we believe, we at once have an acquisition of no inconsiderable importance.

As the being of a God is the foundation of all religion, nothing can be more desirable, than to be familiar with this truth, and also with the way in which it is made obvious and certain.

HERE let it be observed in the first place, that there was a period when the world did not exist. If the heavens and the earth were made, or ever had a beginning, then there must have been a period' when they were not in existence. The only question, therefore, to be solved is this, whether the heaven and the earth have always existed.

IT is certain from objects all around us, that the earth hath not always existed in the same mode. The face of nature is continually changing from one appearance to another. Material objects are continually putting on new forms. Secondary causes have influence on the size and shape of bodies. Man has strength to convert a wilderness into a fruitful field. Trees and stones are fashioned and erected into buildings. Metals are extracted from mines, and by the arts of mechanism are manufactured into utensils in countless variety. Indeed almost all objects around us are continually fluctuating and varying. The vegetable world has a thousand different aspects. The same plant has a succession of various colors. The grass and flowers of the field, at first small and tender, gradually advance towards maturity; presently they decay and return to earth. With animal bodies it is similar. They advance from a feeble state to their full strength and vigor; by and by their beauty fades, they die and mingle with the dust. From these facts, it appears, that the world has not always existed in the same mode.

And if things do not always exist in the same modes, it can never be made to appear they have always existed in any mode.

Some infidel writers have alledged and earnestly contended, that matter, has a necessary existence, that it cannot otherwise than exist, and that there has been an eternal succession of causes and effects, and that things have always gone on in their present course. If matter has a necessary existence, all its modes must be equally necessary. To say that matter has a necessary existence, and yet that some of its modes are accidental, is absurd; because that which constitutes an object necessary, makes the attributes of that object necessary also. God has a necessary existence, and this renders the perfections of his nature necessary. But with material substances it is different. Many of their modes are accidental. Roundness is necessary to constitute a globe, but roundness is accidental as it respects the matter which compose it. Alter any way the figure of a globe and roundness ceases to belong to it as an attribute. Now if matter had a necessary, and eternal existence, such as belongs to the perfections of God, it must be entirely independent in and of itself, and subject to no change, and of course all its forms and modes must remain forever the same. Motion is sometimes an attribute of matter, but it is not an essential one, because the same body may move at one time, and at another be at rest.

If matter were necessary and eternal in its existence, and its nature were to be sedentary, it would be impossible to give it motion, because that which is necessary in its existence cannot acquire any new affection or attribute. If a thing exists necessarily, it necessarily exists the same. For if that which has a necessary existence can undergo a change, it ceases to be what it was in a prior period, which destroys the idea of necessary and eternal existence, and for this reason—That which exists necessarily and from eternity, must be absolutely independent, it cannot be controlled by a foreign cause in the least degree whatsoever, as this would at once destroy the notion of independence and establish the contrary, viz. a state of dependence. Now it plainly appears, that matter is not independent. It is capable of being moved, and on the withdrawment of that which causes it to move, it will become sedentary. Matter being in so many respects dependent, shows that it cannot be eternal, and of course, that there was a period when the world did not exist.

It appears farther, that the world has not always existed from the evident design and plan exhibited in its very structure. The heavens and the earth manifest the surest marks of intelligence. Can we behold the celestial worlds, without being forcibly struck with the idea of astonishing understanding and judgment in their contriver and disposer. View the sun in his strength and the moon which rules the night; Consider their rotations, their regularity, and suitedness to the several parts of the earth, and can you conceive of so much order to be the fruit of mere contingency? Turn your attention to the globe we inhabit, think of the number of living creatures with which it abounds, all which are organized with parts suited to the respective places they occupy, all constituting the most finished whole. With this prospect before us, can we help discovering the skill and wisdom of an infinite artist? It is impossible to separate these surprising effects from

an unlimited intelligence. Now it is obvious that matter, however modified and adjusted, has none of the powers of reasoning and comparing. Any thing of this nature, appears to be totally foreign from material substances of every description. If there be no degree of evidence presented to us, that matter has the least particle of rationality, then it will follow that the contrary must be undeniably true. This reasoning is admissible and perfectly conclusive where the point to be settled admits only of a single alternative. Where one of two suppositions must be false, and the other true, and one has nothing to sustain it, the other of course stands confirmed. If there be no evidence that two and two are equal to five, then there is certain evidence that two and two are not equal to five. Every truth supposes evidence to maintain it, and such evidence can no more be destroyed by counter evidence, than truth can be changed into falsehood or falsehood into truth. If there be certain evidence that the degrees of a circle are equal to those of a square, or that all the parts are equal to the whole, then there can be no evidence to the contrary. According to the same way of reasoning, it will follow, that if there be no evidence that matter has thought and intelligence, then it is certainly destitute of any such power. And if so the design and plan visible in the works of nature, go to prove they must have had an intelligent cause and of course that there was a period when the world did not exist. We may therefore see the exact amount of this argument. We have just so much evidence that the heavens and the earth have not always existed, as we have of design and intelligence displayed in the objects around us.

The Mosaic account of creation, perfectly accords with the foregoing argument. What is said by the Divine Legate respecting the commencement of things, is concise and simple, and yet sublime and grand, and carries with it all the marks of credibility. The account commences thus. "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." The process observed in creation is made known, and when all the works were finished. No sooner do we assent to this statement of divine inspiration upon the subject, than we adopt the sentiment, that there was a period when the world did not exist.

This leads to a second observation; that if there was a period when the world did not exist, there was a period when the world had a beginning. However mysterious it may seem that this vast system of things should rise out of nothing into being, it nevertheless merits our entire belief. We know nothing of the mode of divine operation in the production of the world. All we know is the fact. We have no ocular view of the cause. We behold the effect, and this is sufficient to satisfy us respecting this mysterious truth. So soon as we relinquish the idea that matter is eternal, independent and necessary in its existence, we must believe it had a beginning. If the world was not from eternity, there was a period when it was not in being, and if so, there was a first period of its existence.

This brings us to a third observation, viz. that if the world had a beginning at a certain period, before which it was not in existence, there must have been a cause of its coming into being. Every effect has a cause. This is as true of effects comparatively small, as of those which are larger. The motion of

a leaf is an effect; but this motion has a cause, without which the leaf would be at rest. The workmanship of a watch is an effect, and tho' we do not see the hand which executed it, yet we know that it had a cause. Had we ten years ago passed through an uncultivated wilderness, and should we now follow the same tract, and observe improved fields, gardens, houses and the various implements of convenience, should we not at once trace these effects to their respective causes? It is the first principle in the human mind to reason from effect to cause. While I am contemplating this subject my little child of between two and three years old is with me in my study, and looking at a piece of common furniture, asks me who made it? Not making a direct answer, the child repeats the question. Without any previous instruction children reason abundantly in this way, from effect to cause. Accordingly all must see, that if the world had a beginning it must have derived its existence from some cause. The notion that the world, at a certain period, ushered itself into existence, is one of the grossest absurdities imaginable. This supposes an astonishing effect, without a cause, which is contrary to known fact and experience even in things minute. It gives agency to nonentity. Can a thing act prior to its having being or the least power of action? The supposition is absurd. It is hence certain, if the world began to exist at a certain period, it must have had a cause.

The way is prepared to observe fourthly—that if the world must have had a cause, it must have had an adequate cause. We might as well suppose an effect without a cause, and go all lengths in absurdity, as to suppose an effect to exist by a cause inadequate to such effect. A man cannot plan and rear an edifice, if he be inadequate to such a work. An idiot can move a stone or a stick; but to fabricate a ship or perform the workmanship of a clock, he is totally inadequate. One man has strength to lift an hundred pounds weight; but he is inadequate to the lifting of twenty hundreds. This shews, that every cause must be adequate to the effect produced by it. The world is an effect. It is an effect great and wonderful; and if it could not have existed without a cause, as plainly appears, then, the cause must have been sufficient and adequate to account for the extent of such existence. There must have been that in the cause, not only capable of producing such effect; but the effect must have owed its existence to such cause and nothing else. If, therefore, the world must have had a cause, it must have had an adequate cause.

Fifthly if the world, was produced by an adequate cause, this cause must have been infinite, because none other could have been adequate. This will be easily made to appear from reason and analogy. Man has power to a certain extent, but he has no power to create any thing. The united efforts of finite beings are totally inadequate to the production of something out of nothing. And between that power which is incapable, and that which is capable, of creating, there is no medium. Now if finite power falls essentially short of being able to make a world, and there is no medium between finite an infinite, it will follow, that the cause of the existence of the heaven and the earth, must be an infinite cause, and this cause is none other than the eternal and ever blessed God himself.

We are now prepared for a sixth

observation. If the cause which made the world be infinite, and this infinite cause be God, then every attribute belonging to this infinite cause must be infinite. If the creator of all things has knowledge, he must have it to an infinite extent. He must take in universal being at one intuitive view; and to suppose otherwise is attaching that to him which can never belong to an infinite cause. The same may be said of every other attribute of his nature. If God be wise, he must be infinite in wisdom; if he have power, he must be omnipotent, if good and merciful, he must be infinite in these perfections. Hence from plain and conclusive argument, we have decided an ample evidence of an infinite and incomprehensible being, possessed of all possible perfection, who in the beginning created the heaven and the earth. E.

From the Panoplist.

SKETCHES FROM SCRIPTURE.

"Seest thou this woman?"

Blessed are the tears of the contrite heart! They are not like those of the selfish and carnal, which only aggravate the disappointments, by which they are occasioned. But they are tears unto life, which produce tranquility, purify the soul, and prepare it to receive those consolations of the gospel, *which are neither few nor small.*

"*She hath done what she could,*" said our blessed Saviour, with eyes beaming compassion and benevolence upon the woman. It was not much, but it was all she could do, and all that Jesus required. She repented, and came to confess her sins, to mourn for them with humility, love, and faith. The queen of Sheba could do no more. For the gold of Ophir could not make an atonement. Jesus only could pay the price of her redemption. *Much was forgiven, for she loved much.*

This woman, perhaps, had been one of the fashionables of Jerusalem, and, in the opinion of the world, sustained an unblemished character. But the rule, by which the world judges, is not the law of God, and therefore it is commonly erroneous. She had been, probably, one of the thoughtless, loquacious, giddy tribe, whose only pursuit is amusement, and who seek it, free from the restraints of moral principles. Her companions may have been those, who like herself were never less happy than when at home, nor ever more so, than when at shews and spectacles, or wherever a multitude were assembled. In her mind, actions were classed, not into virtuous and vicious, but like her garments, into fashionable and unfashionable. When reflection exercised her mind, her thoughts were of "changeable suits of apparel, and the mantles, and the wimples, and the crisping pins, the glasses, and the fine linen, and the hoods, and the veils."

Or perhaps, more sedate and lofty in her carriage, disdaining vulgar vices, and viewing with comtempt the silly throng, she chose to sin in a more sober, retired, premeditated manner. Her companions were the free thinkers of the day, who said, *there is no God*, and with them she jeered at the solemn worship of the temple. With them she vied in magnificent entertainments and equipage, in the haughtiness of her demeanour, and cruelty of her heart. Or perhaps, she was a sinner of a less conspicuous and more common sort. Her understanding

cultivated, her temper mild, an amiable daughter, sister and wife, and lacked only one thing needful. "God was not in all her thoughts." Religion never appeared to her, matter in which she had any concern. She beheld the smoke of the morning and evening sacrifices, as it rose to heaven, and she heard the songs of praise, which issued from the temple, yet her heart never glowed with devotion. Not like the holy Anna, who consecrated her days to God, she regarded passovers and sabbaths only as unwelcome interruptions of her household affairs. The law and the prophets were neglected, and her affections entirely engrossed by the world. Alas! where is the distinction between indifference and contempt; neglect of divine worship, and infidelity and profaneness? Is it not a heinous sin to be any thing less than wholly devoted to God?

Whatever may have been the peculiar traits in the character of this woman, it is certain she was a sinner, and Christ came to call every sinner to repentance. Behold the wandering sheep returning to the fold, and observe how kindly the benevolent shepherd greets her return! There are no chidings; nothing cold and repulsive in his manner. *The lost sheep is found and there is joy in heaven.* She comes with humility, penetrated with shame and sorrow for her past life, confessing her guilt, and ready to surrender herself to divine justice. She comes with ardent love to God, adorning his character, and overwhelmed with gratitude for the mercy, which had suffered her crimes so long, and now submitting with all her heart and soul to his goverment. She comes with faith, believing that God is in Christ reconciling the world to himself, and overpowered with the vast idea of his condescension and love to a fallen world, which is now unfolded to her mind. She hastens to cast herself at the feet of Jesus, whom she had so long regarded with dislike, and glorying in repentance, she makes it as public as her crimes. She enters the house of Simon, presses through the crowd, and kneels at his feet, washes them with streams of tears, kisses them, wipes them with her dishevelled tresses, and pours on them the precious spikenard. "Ah Lord! does she seem to say, "My Lord, and my God! Against thee have I sinned. Punish me and I will not murmur. Because thy mercy is infinite, therefore it reaches to such a vile worm as I am. I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest, and to bear thy reproach shall be sweeter than even the applause of the world was to me. Those who love thee shall be my friends and companions. The world shall have no more a share in my heart: Lord I give it all to thee; condescend to make it thine. O that my head were waters, and my eyes fountains of tears, that I might weep for my sins, as I have cause to weep. O that I could for ever sit at thy feet, that I might never more depart from thy presence, for no where else shall I find any comfort." It is grace, that triumphs when the proud sinner is subdued, and brought a willing captive to the throne of mercy. Not like the conquerors of this world, whose trophies are the gory arms and garments of their slaughtered foes; the trophies of the Holy Spirit are the serenity, the joy, and the holiness of the converted soul.

LA TRAPPE.

A PRAYER

By Sir William Jones.

ETERNAL and incomprehensible mind, who, by thy boundless power, before time began, created'st innumerable worlds for thy glory, and innumerable orders of beings for their happiness, which thy infinite goodness prompted thee to desire, and thy infinite wisdom enabled thee to know! we, thy creatures, vanish into nothing before thy supreme majesty; we hourly feel our weakness; we daily bewail our vices; we continually acknowledge our folly; thee only we adore with awful veneration; thee we thank with the most fervent zeal; thee we praise with astonishment and rapture; to thy power we humbly submit; of thy goodness we devoutly implore protection; on thy wisdom we firmly and cheerfully rely. We do but open our eyes, and instantly we perceive thy divine existence; we do but exert our reason, and in a moment we discover thy divine attributes; but our eyes could not behold thy splendor, nor could our minds comprehend thy divine essence: we see thee only through thy stupendous and all perfect works; we know thee only by that ray of sacred light, which it has pleased thee to reveal. Nevertheless, if creatures too ignorant to conceive, and too depraved to pursue, the means of their own happiness, may without presumption express their wants to their creator, let us humbly supplicate thee to remove from us that evil, which thou hast permitted for a time to exist, that the ultimate good of all may be complete, and to secure us from that vice, which thou sufferest to spread snares around us, that the triumph of virtue may be more conspicuous. Irradiate our minds with all useful truth; instil into our hearts a spirit of general benevolence; give understanding to the foolish; meekness to the proud; temperance to the dissolute; fortitude to the feeble-hearted; hope to the desponding; faith to the unbelieving; diligence to the slothful: patience to those who are in pain, and thy celestial aid to those who are in danger: comfort the afflicted; relieve the distressed; supply the hungry with salutary food, and the thirsty with a plentiful stream. Impute not our doubts to indifference, nor our slowness of belief to hardness of heart; but be indulgent to our imperfect nature, and supply our imperfections by thy heavenly favour. "Suffer not, we anxiously pray, suffer not oppressions to prevail over innocence, nor the might of the avenger over the weakness of the just." Whenever we address thee in our retirement from the vanities of the world, if our prayers are foolish, pity us; if presumptuous, pardon us; if acceptable to thee, grant them all powerful GOD, grant them; and, as with our living voice, and with our dying lips, we will express our submission to thy decrees, adore thy providence, and bless thy dispensations, so, in all future states, to which we reverently hope thy goodness will raise us, grant that we may continue praising, admiring, venerating, worshipping thee more and more, thro' worlds without number, and ages without end!

January 1, 1782.

THE foregoing prayer is published not as expressing the particular belief of Sir William Jones, in the doctrines of Jesus Christ, though it can hardly be supposed that such an address to God could have been dictated by infidel principles. We are happy to find that his Biographer, Lord Teignmouth, considers

him as one of the most exalted characters, which modern times have produced, and that he was a firm believer in the Mosaic account of the creation and of the divinity and authenticity of the scriptures.

ANECDOTE.

Dr. Doddridge preached and published a sermon on the death of the Rev. James Shepherd, who died May 19, 1746, ætatis 22. In the course of the sermon the doctor terms Mr. Shepherd his "dear pupil, who but the very last sacrament day was at the table of the Lord, and who, but a few days before, had been speaking to the assembly in his name. He had just been unanimously chosen to preside over a numerous and important congregation, and was within a few weeks to have taken his stated residence among them."

He retired to rest one evening tolerably well. In the morning he was found in his bed "speechless and senseless, continuing without perception, and in a great measure without motion, till he expired."

The following circumstance deserves to be remarked, as it serves to show how babes may perfect the praises of Jehovah, while employed in directing the views of the most eminent of his servants to the path of duty, consolation and honor.

"Let us," says the doctor, "lay down this as a foundation that it is the *hand of Christ*. He has taken away his young servant whom he raised up here, whom he called so early by his grace, whom he taught to pray when he was but a child, and to pray in such a manner that I will take the liberty publicly to tell you, that, the account of a prayer of his, overheard, when he little thought of it, by a near friend, almost seventeen years ago, that is, when he was but *five years old*, had its influence in engaging me to come and settle in this place." O.

SELECTED.

THE BIBLE.

This little Book is Heav'n transcrib'd; a fair
Copy of Glory, drawn for human use;
Eternity abridg'd; *Jehovah* penn'd;
Immensity contracted to a span;
Invisibility expos'd to view.—
The starry sky and this unwieldy world,
Shall sink to one confus'd and gen'ral ruin;
But this shall stand, eternally shall stand,
Coeval with *Jehovah's* Throne and Years.

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